

Sierra Conservancy funds on course for Auburn-area forest health

City of Auburn, Placer Land Trust projects up for Sierra Nevada Conservancy board OK

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AUBURN CA - Healthy forest efforts in the Auburn area are in line for nearly half a million dollars in grant funding from the Sierra Nevada Conservancy.

The two projects that will be recommended by staff for funding approval at the Auburn-based conservancy's board meeting next month are for Placer Land Trust forest management on a Bear River preserve and Auburn Fire Department shaded fuel break efforts along the American River canyon.

About \$4.9 million in grant awards for work to restore Sierra Nevada forests to ecological health and prevent damaging forest fires will be up for approval at the June 7 meeting of the conservancy's governing board. The quarterly meeting will be in Inyo County's Lone Pine.

Competition for the conservancy funding, which comes from Proposition 84, passed by voters in 2006, has been heavy.

"For this round of funding, we received nearly 200 initial requests, which we have painstakingly reduced to 26 recommendations to the board," Executive Officer Jim Branham said.

Branham added that the large number of requests is a result of the poor condition of many of the Sierra's forests and the growing threat of catastrophic wildfire.

Auburn Mayor Kevin Hanley, who also serves as chairman of the Greater Auburn Firesafe Council, said that the grant request's focus will be on the American River canyon lands below Auburn and creating more defensible space.

The grant would provide \$146,690 in funding. Hanley said this was the second year Auburn had attempted to secure a similar conservancy grant.

“I’m excited (at the prospects),” Hanley said. “With the lack of rain, it’s been pretty dry and we should be doing everything we can to help provide protection. The conservancy has the right attitude about healthy forests and we’re in sync with what they’re doing.”

A successful grant application would mean getting the California Conservation Corps and possibly some inmate crews out working on the canyon perimeter, Hanley said. Their work would be bolstered by the efforts of residents.

“Right now we’re working with the Riverview neighborhood to use goats to clear some of the land,” Hanley said. “We may have some community meetings in late June. The board still has to vote on it but it looks really good.”

Jeff Darlington, Placer Land Trust executive director, said a \$300,000 grant being recommended to the board would allow the non-profit to implement improved forest-management practices at the Harvego Bear River Preserve.

“This will result in an additional 90-acre fuel-load reduction zone, with better forest health and all the associated water quality that comes with it,” Darlington said.

Work would take place over the next 1 years on property owned by the land trust west of Highway 49. The oak-studded property borders the northern part of the Auburn Valley Golf & Country Club acreage and extends to the Bear River.

The conservancy is a state agency with a mission to improve the environmental, economic and social well-being of the Sierra Nevada region. In its first five years, it has awarded about \$40 million in grants for projects including fuels reduction, conservation easements and watershed restoration.